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Board of Finance Budget Hearing

Thursday, April 20, 2023

High Plains Community Center Cafeteria - 7:00 p.m.

Approved

Attendance

Board of Finance Members Present: Chairman Kevin Houlihan, Vice Chairman James Leahy, Kevin Moffett, and Kevin McNabola

Staff: John Cifarelli, Finance Director; Deborah Satonick, Recording Secretary

Guests: Dr. Vince Scarpetti, Superintendent of OBOE; Dr. Jennifer Byars, Superintendent of Amity School District; Town Officials and members of the public

1. Call to Order

- Chairman Houlihan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked Mr. Okenquist to lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Houlihan acknowledged everyone in the audience from the educational sector and thanked the key contributors in preparing the 2023-2024 budget. He proceeded to outline the budget development process and noted that the Orange Board of Finance unanimously approved the 2023-2024 budget.
- Mr. Leahy made use of a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the responsibilities of the Orange Board of Finance. He showed the effect of compound interest and reported that the Town of Orange has a AAA credit rating. Mr. Leahy noted that there was an increase of 2.83% in Grand List revenue, which was 93% higher than the average growth over the last ten years. In addition, with a strong Grand List increase, the OBOF proposed a revenue overage of 1.22%, which could result in a decrease in taxes for next year.
- Chairman Houlihan noted that the factors impacting the budget are inflation, wage growth, interest rates, gasoline prices, safety and security, and home heating costs. The three components of the budget are the Orange Board of Education, Amity, and Town government.
- Mr. Leahy illustrated the proposed Amity budget as it applies to the three respective towns of Orange, Woodbridge, and Bethany as follows:

Town Budget.	5.50 percent increase
OBOE	3.37 percent increase
Amity	2.25 percent increase

- Mr. Leahy noted that due to a decrease of Orange student enrollment at Amity from 50,369 to 48,894, the Town of Orange will have a 1.475 % decrease in their portion of the Amity budget. Mr. Cifarelli concluded this section of the presentation by discussing the six union contracts, their renewals, and the subsequent wage adjustments.

2. Orange Board of Education – Dr. Vince Scarpetti

- Dr. Scarpetti recognized members in the audience who are part of the OBOE. He spoke briefly about the negative impact of COVID on education. He proceeded to state their Mission Statement and outlined the district goals. Safe and healthy environments continue to be a high priority.
- Dr. Scarpetti discussed their budget process, noting that actual student enrollment typically increases throughout the year. The 2023-2024 budget has a 3.37% increase, with a total budget of \$23,447,185. He illustrated with a pie graph that most of this increase is “human capital,” comprised of contractual obligations in wages and benefits. Other budget increases include a mandatory HVAC assessment, classroom furniture upgrades, and basic utility costs. He also spoke on the need for armed security guards at the schools. This year there have been decreases in the budget in the Special Education Department and in Health Insurance.

3. Amity – Dr. Jennifer Byars

- Dr. Byars acknowledged individuals in the audience that are on the Amity Finance Committee and the Amity Board of Education. She also recognized and thanked Dr. Scarpetti for explaining the budget process, which is similar to the process used by Amity.
- Dr. Byars listed the three goals of the school district: improve instruction, creativity, student engagement and performance, enhance efficient use of resources, and foster a supportive climate for students. Dr. Byars explained the Portrait of the Graduate and mentioned some of the accolades of students in academics, athletics, and the arts.
- Dr. Byars explained the budget drivers, including inflation at a 6% increase, contractual increases, health care costs, personnel, pupil services, technology, capital projects and student enrollment. She discussed the increase of staff requirements in the proposed budget.
- Dr. Byars explained that keeping a 2% surplus for Capital Reserve allows the schools to plan for Capital improvements without the need for a bond, eliminating financing. The overall proposed 2023-2024 budget is 2.25% increase.

4. Orange Town Budget – Mr. Leahy

- Mr. Leahy discussed in detail the proposed 2023-2024 budget, adding that 2/3 of the overall budget is earmarked for education. He highlighted the expenditures used on road paving and the process of prioritizing which roads need to be paved. Based on the three components of the budget (Town, OBOE, Amity) Mr. Leahy indicated that the new mill rate will be 32.31. Residents can vote on the Amity budget on May 17th. Important upcoming dates are the Annual Town Meeting on May 10th and the referendum on May 2nd. All of the previously mentioned meetings and voting dates will be at High Plains Community Center Gym.

7. Questions and Answers

- Mitch Goldblatt, 281 Drummond Road – Mr. Goldblatt thanked the Orange Board of Finance for their hard work in preparing the new budget. He mentioned that April 29th is Recycling Day and asked all residents to participate, if possible. He asked the Board to consider the request to hire a Recycling Attendant and substantiated the need for this position. He also requested that the Board consider \$500k for road paving so that roads can be repaired in a timelier and more cost-effective way. Lastly, he indicated that several newspaper articles wrongly discredited the Amity budget and he asked all residents to support the Amity budget, which he believes is fiscally sound.
- Mary Welander, 377 Dogwood Road – Ms. Welander inquired about the \$219k cut in the Town budget and asked what services were being cut. She was advised that services are not going to be cut. She also inquired into the \$170k increase in recycling costs. Lastly, Ms. Welander spoke on behalf of the school district and stressed the importance of education as an investment into our children.
- Sylvester Selcedo, 851 Shagbark Drive – Mr. Selcedo spoke in favor of the DEI position at school and felt that diversity, equity, and inclusion should become a part of every town department. He also spoke on the defeated confederacy and felt that this defeat should become a part of our history and culture.
- Anna Manhon, 965 Orange Center Road – Ms. Manhon spoke on the investment of education for our children. She encouraged everyone to vote in favor of the Amity budget.
- Ron Kaye, 90 Hall Drive – Mr. Kaye spoke highly of the Town of Orange, indicating that he has been a resident for two years. He suggested that the town look at innovative ideas to improve education as well as Town departments to make Orange an even better place to live.
- Mark Moyer, 971 Rainbow Trail – Mr. Moyer stated that he is the Secretary and Treasurer of the Orange Recycling Committee and has seen mixed recycling in wrong places at the Transfer Station. He supports Mr. Goldblatt in hiring a part time attendant to supervise and enforce proper recycling. Lastly, he reminded the community that April 29th is Recycling Day.
- Chris Browe, 160 Ohman Avenue – He mentioned that he is on the Amity Finance Committee and asked residents to support the Amity budget. He noted that with their Capital Reserve, Amity have been able to avoid bonding fees and this is wise fiscal planning.

8. Adjournment

Chairman Houlihan noted that there were no further questions/comments on the proposed 2023-2024 budget and adjourned the meeting at 9:24 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah Satonick
Recording Secretary